

NICE TO ‘MEET’ YOU

CHRISTOS PANTIERAS

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS**

**GRADUATE PROGRAM IN VISUAL ARTS
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO**

MARCH 2015

© Christos Pantieras, 2015

ABSTRACT

This paper accompanies the key manifestation of my research at York University: the solo thesis exhibition entitled, *Nice to 'Meet' You*, installed at Gales Gallery from March 30th to April 3rd, 2015. My research explores how we interact through social media and online platforms, and the desire to make a connection with one another. Through a contextualization of my studio practice this paper provides an overview of my thesis exhibition and addresses how my work is a reflection on how we interact online when seeking out an intimate connection. What remains as a relational artifact when correspondence is broken? What is the ongoing story after 'delete'? Is it ever truly over?

DEDICATION

I returned to complete my Masters of Fine Arts at a time in my life that required a lot of personal strength, courage, and guts. This journey was my own to take, but it was enriched with the support, encouragement, and guidance from those who I love and care for deeply. I dedicate this paper and exhibition to my parents Terry and Litsa Pantieras; my brothers and their families Nick and Cathy Pantieras, Eleni Pantieras, Falia Pantieras, Alexia Pantieras, Tony and Aura Pantieras, Terry Pantieras, Pablo Pantieras, Christian Pantieras; Susan L. Dubois; Anthony Grandy; my amazing friends and extended family in Ottawa and Toronto.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Susan Crocker and John Hunkin Award in Fine Arts; Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship; The York University Department of Visual Arts and Art History Faculty, Technicians, and Staff; Mark-David Hosale; Nina Levitt; my Thesis Committee: Andreas Kitzmann, Brandon Vickerd, Kevin Yates; my colleagues and classmates.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Figures.....	vi
Preamble: Exhibition Description.....	vii
Chapter One: First Impressions.....	1
Chapter Two: ‘P’ is for ‘Practice’.....	4
Chapter Three: Nice To ‘Meet’ You.....	10
Chapter Four: ‘P’ is for ‘Process’.....	29
Chapter Five: ‘B’ is for ‘Boom or Bust’.....	36
Chapter Six: Conclusion.....	41
Bibliography.....	43

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Nice to ‘Meet’ You (installation view).....	ix
Figure 2	Nice to ‘Meet’ You (installation view).....	ix
Figure 3	Nice to ‘Meet’ You (installation view).....	x
Figure 4	Nice to ‘Meet’ You (installation view).....	x
Figure 5	I Miss Talking To You.....	5
Figure 6	Impress Me.....	7
Figure 7	Impress Me (detail).....	8
Figure 8	HEY.HORNY.GRRRR.....	11
Figure 9	HEY.HORNY.GRRRR (detail).....	12
Figure 10	HEY.HORNY.GRRRR (detail).....	13
Figure 11	HEY.HORNY.GRRRR (detail).....	14
Figure 12	HEY.HORNY.GRRRR (detail).....	14
Figure 13	Say What You Mean (installation view).....	15
Figure 14	Say What You Mean.....	16
Figure 15	Tread Lightly.....	17
Figure 16	Tread Lightly (detail).....	18
Figure 17	Tread Lightly (detail).....	18
Figure 18	I AM THE COIN.....	19
Figure 19	I Keep Coming Back To You.....	21
Figure 20	I Keep Coming Back To You (detail).....	22
Figure 21	Untitled No. 1 to 7 (installation view).....	23
Figure 22	Untitled No. 3.....	24
Figure 23	Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.).....	25
Figure 24	House.....	27
Figure 25	Studio progress of letters cast in cement.....	30
Figure 26	Malediction.....	32
Figure 27	Field.....	34

PREAMBLE: EXHIBITION DESCRIPTION

The thesis paper is a supporting document to my final major solo thesis exhibition for the Master of Fine Arts program at York University. Entitled, *Nice to 'Meet' You*, the works in the exhibition investigate the manner in which individuals communicate online using social media and digital messaging in order to make a personal or intimate connection. The thesis exhibition is mounted from Monday, March 30th to Friday, April 3rd, 2015 in the Gales Gallery of 105 Accolade West.

When entering the gallery the viewer will see that the exhibition is comprised of both two- and three-dimensional works. On the floor are three sculptures created from the acts of piling, stacking, and arranging of thousands of palm-sized letters that have been cast in concrete. The largest of the three installations, *HEY.HORNY.GRRRR.*, consists of thousands of concrete letters that swell from three mounds to spread out onto the gallery floor and form various words and phrases. From one vantage point the three mounds seem to be solely created from heaps of letters piled and accumulated upon each other. When moving around the installation it becomes apparent that the mounds are supported by the inclusion of three industrial and household grade white buckets that are almost completely covered by the concrete elements of the work. The letters are in a state of overflow as they spill out from these buckets and reach out in to the gallery space. Throughout the work concrete letters are placed together intermittently to form stacks and formations of varying heights and lengths that depict specific vocabulary sourced from hook-up apps catered to the gay community, such as the most common greetings “GRRRR” and “HORNY”. The work examines the semiotics of gay hook-up culture while revealing the straightforwardness and/or intensity of language choice.

The two remaining sculptures are smaller in scale. The main components to *Say What You Mean* include a large pile of letters and two found objects: an old industrial grade broom embedded within the pile and a small household grade bucket. The broom handle, or shaft, jets out from the pile of letters and together mimic the form of a mop. Placed next to these components is one small white bucket that is partially filled with water. The water references the process of mixing cement while making connections to considerations of renewal and to cleanliness. The third, *Tread Lightly*, is tucked in the corner and consists solely of the letters cast in concrete. The letters are arranged in 44 rows, one row for each letter of the title of the work, with varying quantities of each letter to create fluctuating lengths. The text reads “I’m not supposed to be going where I’m treading with you” and is sourced from a text message that indicates an individuals’ intent clearly out of the boundaries of their current relationship.

On the walls is *I Keep Coming Back To You*, a series of twenty-one sheets of carbon paper that have been fed through a typewriter and impressed with e-mail correspondences expressing regret. The text is typed one letter at a time repeated across the page modifying the deciphering of the document from across the page to down the page. The typing process impresses onto the surface and also rips and tears through the carbon paper. Alongside these works are seven black and white photographs, *Untitled No. 1 through 7*, that depict a selection of the carbon paper works in a magnified state. Scaled up the works become a documentation of monumentalized artifacts.

All works in the exhibition depict the digital word in physical form. *Nice to ‘Meet’ You* (Figures 1, 2, 3, 4) is a cumulative presentation of my practice-based research within the creative and critical hub of the Master of Fine Arts program at York University. This paper provides further contextualization of the works in the exhibition and of my practice.



Figure 1 – *Nice to 'Meet' You* (installation view), Christos Pantieras



Figure 2 – *Nice to 'Meet' You* (installation view), Christos Pantieras



Figure 3 – *Nice to ‘Meet’ You* (installation view), Christos Pantieras



Figure 4 – *Nice to ‘Meet’ You* (installation view), Christos Pantieras

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

“You will do nicely”
(Sourced from Grindr. Date unknown)

Asking another on a date, or expressing ones interest in another once took a more modest form than what is experienced today: The telephone in ones’ hand burdened by the weight of anticipation; the adrenaline of being face to face with another person and then uttering the words “Will you go out with me?” Today connections are primarily made through portable technology and communication is now navigated through two forums of connectivity: offline and online. In the offline community, or in real life (IRL), individuals experience face-to-face contact. Online individuals are in a constant state of being ‘plugged in’ and able to communicate and interact with each other swiftly. On our devices we¹ now browse through a grid of personal profiles in a similar fashion that we browse through a restaurant menu or a shopping list. With each swipe across a screen decisions are made swiftly based on objectification, a socially acceptable manner of behaviour. “It’s fun to swipe people left or right and be in a powerful position without having to go on an actual date with them and get to know that they’re a disappointing person.”² One can now order up what they are looking for in that specific moment. Gone are the initial feelings and emotions experienced when first making a connection IRL as they are now overshadowed with swift connections and temporary gratification. Social networking platforms, text messages, and emails have amplified the level of immediacy upon which we connect in addition to the accessibility that we have to one-another from local to global and from private to public. We are now living in a new form of public in which we engage and present ourselves within the broader spectrum of the online community. The impact of the internet is a dichotomy: there are new and

¹ Herein the term ‘we’ is in reference to individuals, society, or a general group of people unless otherwise specified.

² Wayne, Teddy. “With Some Dating Apps: Less Casual Sex Than Casual Text.” The New York Times, 7 Nov. 2014. Web. 27 Jan. 2015

plentiful forms of social interaction, engagement, and community formation, yet online activities present an obstacle to real-life interactions.³ This obstacle is the presence of isolation. Although we are connected we are simultaneously alone.

In a time of immediate communication the very weight of the written word can wane depending on the course of events that transpire. Marshal McLuhan chronicled how the evolution of media forms has affected how society interacts. The medium for communication has significantly affected the content of communication. For example, the invention of the printing press heralded duplication and mass production, such as the newspaper, which allowed for the provision of large amounts of information to the masses. When once we gathered to hear of news events scribed on parchment paper, we now read of news events on our mobile devices. In our hands we now carry a tool that is everything McLuhan observed discretely: a telephone, a typewriter, etc.... The medium itself has reshaped communication through its form and the value of the virtual textual word has diminished.⁴ Today we interact within collaborative and interactive virtual communities heralded by Web 2.0 in lieu of the passive and static incarnations of the early Web 1.0. This has led to an explosion of short messaging and digital communication presently navigated through online platforms and social media.

The development of my practice-based research stems from the manner that we communicate today. Patterns of language and writing have shifted from an artifactual nature to become a digital blip in an ever-expanding archive of online discourse. To what depth of intent and degree of transparency do we communicate with the written word when seeking an intimate connection? What resonates beyond this disposable form of interaction and courtship? What is the ongoing story that these social media platforms don't tell? Is it ever truly over?

³ Macnamara, Jim. *The 21st Century Media (r)evolution: Emergent Communication Practices*. New York: Peter Lang, 2010. Page 87. Print.

⁴ McLuhan, Marshal. *Understanding media: the extensions of man*. Critical ed. Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 2003. Print.

This paper will explore how my work has evolved to reflect and respond to the current realities of our online interactions and what lingers as the remnants of a relationship, or a relational fragment. This trajectory will begin with the section *'P' is for 'Practice'* that contextualizes my practice and references two key examples of my previous work. This will be followed by a detailed overview of the specific works in the exhibition in the section *Nice to 'Meet' You*. To frame the contents of the exhibition within the broader contemporary art community, I will draw upon explicit examples from three contemporary artists: Félix González-Torres, Micah Lexier, and Rachel Whiteread. *'P' is for 'Process'* will reference the practice of two artists, Ann Hamilton and Antony Gormley, as I address my own approach to art making through methods of repetition and labour intensities. Prior to the *Conclusion*, the section *'B' is for 'Boom or Bust'* addresses online dating specifically within the framework of my own experiences and how the ease to connect through hook-up apps marketed to the gay community, social media, and digital correspondence have influenced and/or affected what is presented as online dialogue. It is important to note that this paper is not written as a comprehensive study on Communication Theory or Sociology. This paper is a supporting document to my solo thesis exhibition, as well as a personal reflection about my own practice, my experiences when making connections online, how my work has evolved from pre-MFA to this specific exhibition and beyond, and how my practice fits in the broader scope of contemporary art and the artistic community today.

‘P’ IS FOR ‘PRACTICE’

To position the ideas both outlined in this paper and explored in the works featured in the exhibition, it is fundamental to recognize the trajectory of my previous works and how it relates to my artistic practice today. I repurpose digital communication sourced from synchronous (real time) and asynchronous (intermittent) platforms in order to investigate intent when online dialogue is initiated and the subsequent outcome and/or consequence of when dialogue is halted. I explore the shift in interpersonal interaction caused by the paradoxical nature of online relationships through the lens of courtship. However, once a written exchange is no longer occurring what remains? Independent Curator, Johanna Mizgala, states in her curatorial essay:

What do the remnants of a relationship tell us about the bond? What are we to make of an affiliation when only correspondence remains? Is it possible to piece it all together based on snippets of conversation, or do we have to stitch it together with ellipses and lapsed memories? Why does the written word come to bear so much weight as time passes? The very weight of the words seems to wax and wane, depending on the course of the events that transpired. We look for meaning in every phrase, every word literally full of resonance.⁵

It is this resonance that my work begins to take form, informed by the trajectory of feeling and affect. A feeling is a sensation that is formed based on previous experiences and the resulting projection of this feeling is then labeled as emotion⁶. In contrast, affect is an experience of intensity that is neither emotion nor feeling but a moment of unstructured potential. It is prior to, or outside, our consciousness.⁷ I view this moment of intensity and potential as the embodiment of linger. To linger means to spend a long time over something, to stay in a place because of a reluctance to leave.⁸ What resonates and lingers beyond a failed relationship and the halt in correspondence is evidenced in my previous works.

⁵ Mizgala, Johanna. *Christos Pantieras: Your Word Is Bond*. Ottawa: Ottawa Art Gallery, 2012. Page 6. Print.

⁶ Eric Shouse, “Feeling, Emotion, Affect,” *M/C Journal* 8.6 (2005). <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/13-probyn.php>.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Oxford Dictionary Language Matters. N.d. Web. 20 Feb. 2015.

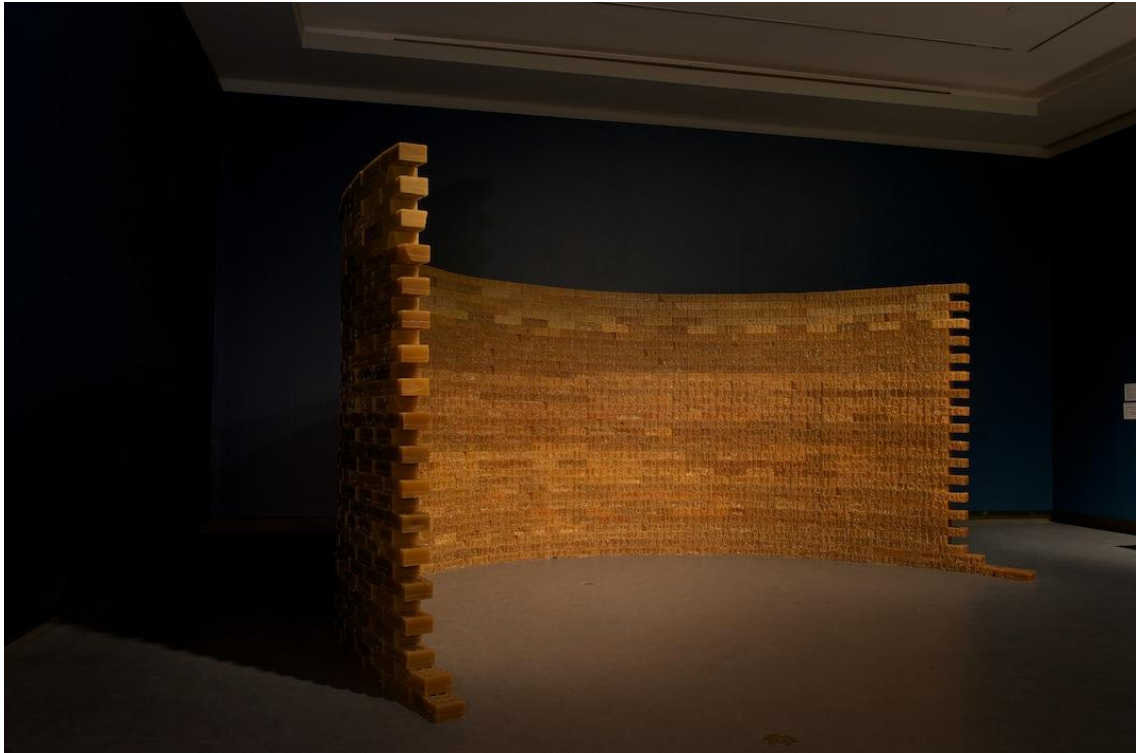


Figure 5 – *I Miss Talking To You*, Christos Pantieras

*I Miss Talking To You*⁹ (Figure 5) is a freestanding wall of 1024 wax-cast bricks bearing the text of a letter of apology and rationalization received via email. Walls are symbols of strength and safety yet in the context of this love affair, walls reference impediments and barriers between two individuals. The work is the remnant of a promising relationship of my own that was abruptly halted with the sudden disappearance of my partner without warning or explanation. For six months there was no communication until an attempt at reconciliation was made through email. However the barriers had been built. What once lingered as uncertainty, confusion, and anger, now took the form of a sculptural installation.

The wall is created entirely in wax. The source of this wax, like most materials in my practice, is significant. The wax was not purchased but rather slowly procured from my local

⁹ *I Miss Talking To You*, Christos Pantieras (Artist), 2012-2013, 1024 bricks cast in wax with carved text sourced from an email, 533cm x 3 cm x 243 cm (dimensions variable)

parish, Koimissis Tis Theotokou, the Dormition of the Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox Church in Ottawa (ON). Within the church parishioners first enter the Narthex. This is the front area where icons are venerated and a solemn and spiritual mood can be achieved before entering the church. One final gesture is to light a candle and secure it in large containers of sand. A candle can be lit for many reasons: a blessing for Him or for another, a token in memory of a loved one long passed, a prayer for another in need, or perhaps as an offering for ones hopes and dreams. In this particular church, due to the high traffic volume and the need for space within the containers of sand the candles are not left to burn until they are naturally extinguished. A church helper stands near to extinguish handfuls of candles that are barely burnt to even three quarters of their capability and drops them in a bin. This bin is then stored until its contents are shipped off for recycling. It is just before this shipment that I procure the candles in order to reform them in to bricks. The wall, now composed entirely from the wax of candles once lit in the church, evokes symbolism of hopes and aspirations, of wishes to come and of unrealized dreams, of desires and of offering. The wall is composed of the prayers of others, giving shape to the words that in this case are the end of a relationship with its own dashed hopes.¹⁰

*Impress Me*¹¹ (Figure 6) focuses on email interaction between with only one half of the communication presented for the viewer to look at. The work consists of 34 pieces of graph paper whose surface was modified by hammering emails letter by letter in to the paper using alphabetized metal printing rods. The emails used are those sent as replies, therefore only one half of the dialogue is presented. Lined up on viewing tables the first few pages are clearly legible and then to completely illegible (Figure 7) towards the end of the sequence as the impact of the printing process produce substantial tears and rips in the papers' surface.

¹⁰ Mizgala, Johanna. *Christos Pantieras: Your Word Is Bond*. Ottawa: Ottawa Art Gallery, 2012. Page 08. Print.

¹¹ *Long Distance*, Christos Pantieras (Artist), 2009, Typed text, paper, wax, wick, typewriter, dimensions variable.

As the correspondence becomes impossible to make out as you near the last of the graph papers, so too has the relationship come to its own ultimate conclusion. The work underscores the pain of an ending where words themselves cause wounds on the pieces of paper.¹²



Figure 6 - *Impress Me*, Christos Pantieras

¹² Mizgala, Johanna. *Christos Pantieras: Your Word Is Bond*. Ottawa: Ottawa Art Gallery, 2012. Page 07. Print.

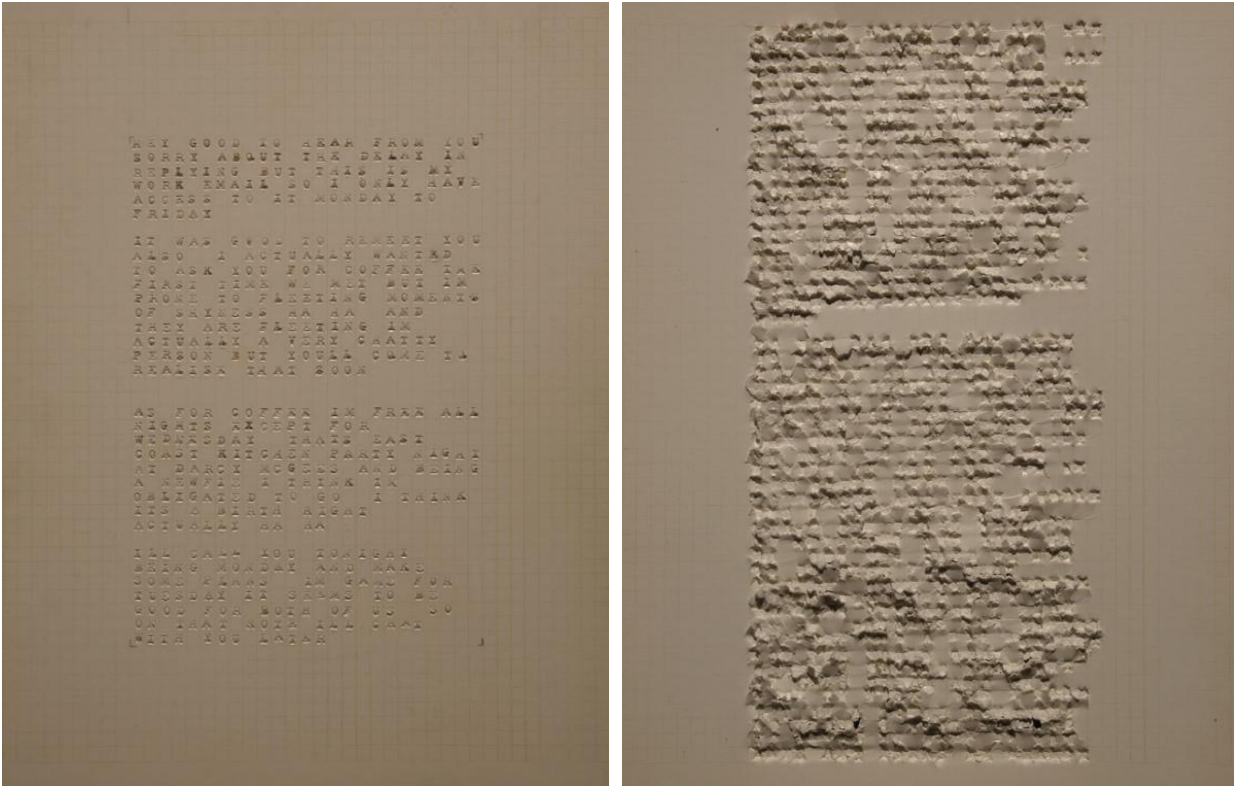


Figure 7 - *Impress Me* (details), Christos Pantieras

These works are tangible traces and representations of the digital word. In both examples, each connection was made online through a dating site only accessible through desktop or laptops. This was a time when mobile devices were not as advanced as they are today (i.e. early 2000's). Once correspondence was established, the flirtations and the narratives were initially nurtured by the to and fro of emails. With each reply, stories were exchanged, aspirations for the future were shared, and ideologies of the perfect relationship were expressed. The excitement of what appeared to be a potentially strong relationship grew and nurtured a predisposition of a heightened and false sense of expectation. However, what was expressed and anticipated within the abundance of digital communication did not always translate to IRL when correspondence shifted to face-to-face interaction. Of the two examples of works previously described, *Impress Me* records a relationship that lasted but a few short weeks while *I Miss Talking To You*, albeit

initially promising, is a manifestation of the abrupt ending of what could have been.

Although both works are responses to my own experiences, they are also manifestations of what remained once communication broke down. These pieces contain layers of melancholy, loss, anger, and despair that are transmitted from the works and in to the atmosphere for others to engage with, respond to, and consider.¹³ These works were produced after each relationship ended; the result of what resonated from these particular individuals once courtship was no longer in play. They are the result of an intangible disconnect that took the form of a tangible need for a connection. Why did these particular individuals have such a resonating effect? Each one of these two men was met at a time when online dating was a new experience for me. As a result, each of these men received a stronger emotional investment (whether they realized it or not). When each connection was dissolved these works emerged as tokens of accountability, as remnants of what was, and as manifestations of melancholy.

How does this level of emotion play in to my artistic practice today? How have my choices in materials shifted to create a connection among my work and my expanded exploration of the online dating realities we now experience? These questions will be addressed in the following section by providing a detailed overview of the sculptural installations, works on carbon paper, and large-scale photographs in my thesis exhibition, *Nice To 'Meet' You*. Specific artworks by contemporary artists Micah Lexier, Félix González-Torres, and Rachel Whiteread are referenced in order to provide additional contextualization of my work in relation to their practice.

¹³ Brennan, Teresa, *The Transmission of Affect*, Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2004, pp. 1-24.

NICE TO ‘MEET’ YOU

Nice to ‘Meet’ You is the title of my solo thesis exhibition that features three sculptures – *HEY.HORNY.GRRRR.*, *Say What You Mean*, *Tread Lightly*, and a series of twenty-one works on paper and seven large format photographs – *I Keep Coming Back To You* and *Untitled No. 1 through 7*. Following the trajectory of my earlier work, this exhibition explores the resonant fragments that linger from online connections and communication. By using text from digital correspondences, that include email and instant messaging through various apps, the most private of utterances are severed from their speakers and monumentalized to a state that ignites language. Language is both physical and material and can be inserted into an environment and engaged.¹⁴ The exhibition becomes an archive of the digital that records the dissolution of affection through online interaction. When a relationship is over, or communication is never reciprocated, one is supposed to be able to move on; these interactions are disposable. However, ones’ emotions are not always considered. What is it that can’t be seen beyond the tap of a screen or with the push of ‘reply’?

HEY.HORNY.GRRRR. (Figures 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) explores the frailty of human connection and sexual encounter by unpacking the semiotics of gay hook-up culture in online and social media platforms such as Scruff, Grindr, and GROWLr.¹⁵ The piece consists of thousands of letters individually cast in monochromatic concrete. The size of the letters mimics the form of the familiar letter-shaped magnets found on refrigerator doors, referencing play and recreation. The concrete letters spill out and disperse from five industrial grade buckets. The buckets link back to the studio process of mixing cement, while simultaneously referencing detritus and an

¹⁴ Goldsmith, Kenneth. *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 211.

¹⁵ These are geosocial networking application geared towards gay, bisexual, and bi-curious men

inability to keep something contained. As the letters cascade and swell to form accumulations of various sized piles, they are also arranged, stacked, and placed together which draws a parallel to the chemistry of the material from which they are created.



Figure 8 - *HEY.HORNY.GRRRR.*, Christos Pantieras

Concrete is formed when an aggregate, an inert granular material such as sand, is mixed with cement and water. The aggregate is a strengthener as the various components of the mix bind together to form the concrete. In a similar manner the individual letters mimic this role as an aggregate for words. On their own the letters are fragmentary like the particles of the cement mix. When they are placed together they are bound and form strong words and bold statements.

The partiality of utterances creates tension against the solidity of their concrete form.¹⁶ In this installation what emerges are words that represent the most popular and candid greetings exchanged through the platforms of Scuff, Grindr, and GROWLr. Examples of greetings that have emerged from these sites include the modest, ‘WOOF’ and ‘GRRRR’, and the bold, “I want to breed fuck you with my poz load”. The installation of this piece, its size, and scope morphs with every installation. The letters, once piled, are then spread out on to the floor. The decision of the amount, placement, and length of the various words and statements is made in-situ in consideration of the space.



Figure 9 - *HEY.HORNY.GRRRR*. (detail), Christos Pantieras

Words exist for the purpose of detournement; assigning a purpose for which it was not intended. It is a way of taking existing words and using them differently so that they become entirely new

¹⁶ Fleet, V. and Toye, M., Encounters, York University, 2015, p. 1.

experiences.¹⁷ For example: taking hateful language and neutering it or taking sweet language and making it ugly. In this instance, *HEY.HORNY.GRRRR*. takes language that is both sweet and hateful and inserts it in to a space on a monumental scale for one to consider, chuckle, be awestruck, or even make a personal connection to ones' own experiences. How fragile are the bonds of words when connection and gratification are immediately available by the tap of a screen? Speaking to the volatile nature of electronic communiqués, which transpire at an accelerated pace only to fade just as quickly, this installation asks us to reconsider the registers of intimacy through the evidence of online engagement.¹⁸

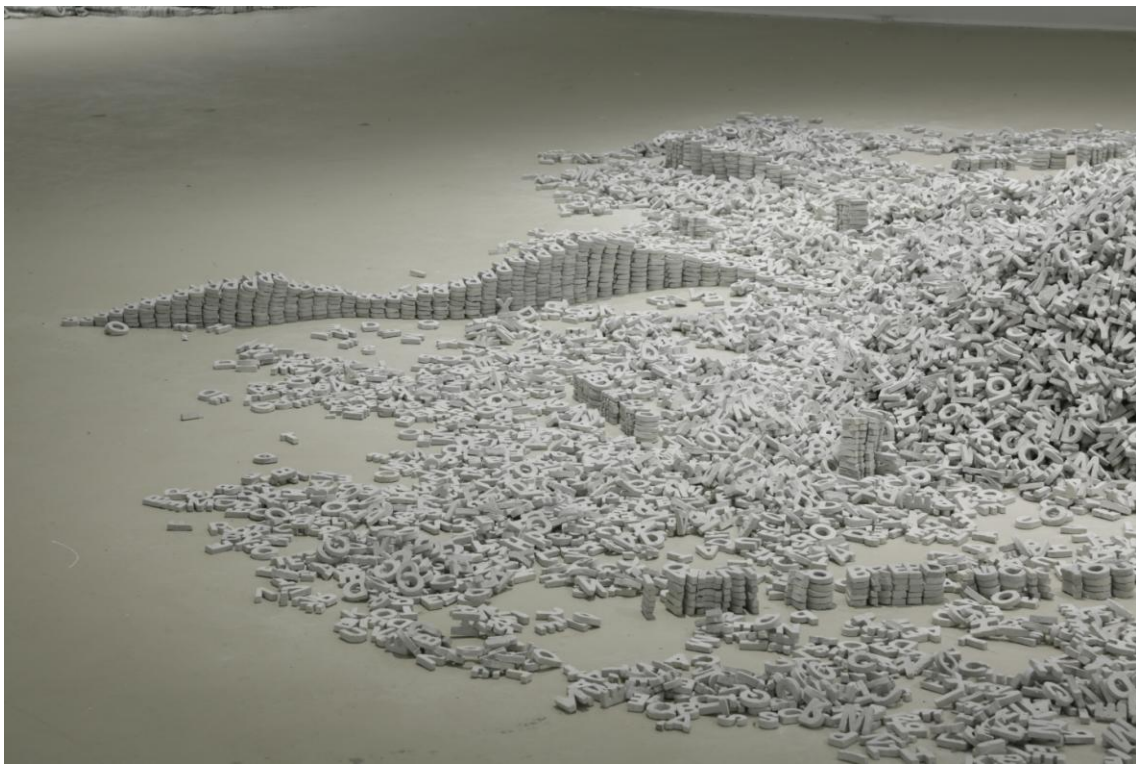


Figure 10 - *HEY.HORNY.GRRRR*. (detail), Christos Pantieras

¹⁷ Goldsmith, Kenneth. *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 38.

¹⁸ Fleet, V. and Toye, M., *Encounters*, York University, 2015, p. 1.



Figure 11 - *HEY.HORNY.GRRRR*. (detail), Christos Pantieras



Figure 12 - *HEY.HORNY.GRRRR*. (detail), Christos Pantieras

In *Say What You Mean* (Figures 13, 14) the head of an old and weathered broom is embedded within a large pile of concrete letters and the shaft of the broom is held in place by the weight of the unformed words. Next to this juxtaposition sits a small household grade bucket filled with water. The water references renewal, cleanliness, and strength. When creating the concrete letters, the units are submerged in water in order for the concrete to gain strength as it cures. The use of the bucket and the broom creates a link to the everyday. We are no longer stationary in one specific place to achieve communication but rather we communicate with our mobile devices as we move from place to place throughout our daily lives. When nurturing an intimate connection among many, how true are we to our own word? Within the pile there are no intentionally legible word formations but rather a heap of potential words from forgettable personal and intimate connections that perhaps never truly meant anything to begin with.



Figure 13 – *Say What You Mean* (installation view), Christos Pantieras



Figure 14 – *Say What You Mean*, Christos Pantieras



Figure 15 – *Tread Lightly*, Christos Pantieras

In the corner of the room concrete letters are lined up and organized in a formation of 44 rows. Each row features a varying number of units of one specific letter to spell out the sentence, and aptly titled, *Tread Lightly* (Figures 15, 16, 17). This was the statement received via text message in response to an inquiry about ones' intentions. Having recognized the impending demise of his relationship of several years with his same-sex partner, this individual began exploring new possibilities for casual encounters and immediate gratification. The work plays on the notion of being called out or 'cornered'. The words are positioned tightly together with the letters positioned sideways to create abstraction and a codification of the statement, and sections rises up to mimic a wave that is either forming or almost receded; a gesture of what is to come or what has already transpired.

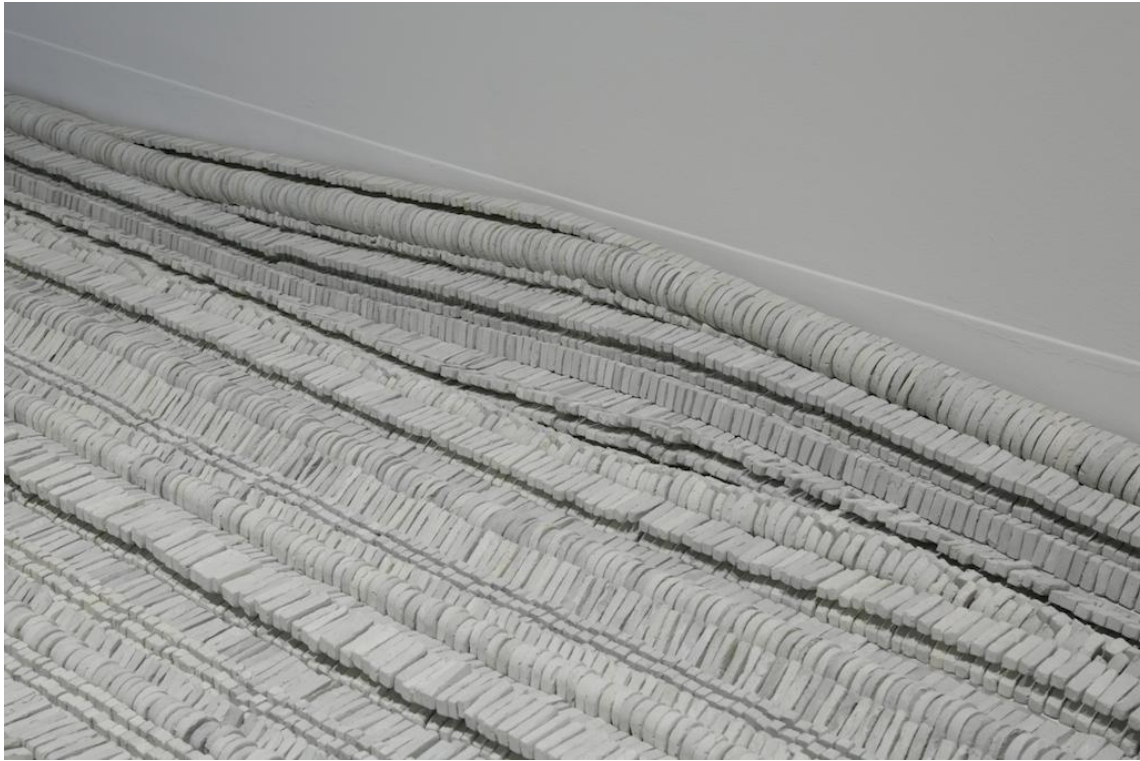


Figure 16 – *Tread Lightly* (detail), Christos Pantieras



Figure 17 – *Tread Lightly* (detail), Christos Pantieras



Figure 18 – *I AM THE COIN*, Micah Lexier¹⁹

The final components to the exhibition are the twenty-one works on carbon paper, *I Keep Coming Back to You*, and the seven large-scale photographs, *Untitled No. 1 to 7*. As I address this series I will begin by first referencing and drawing links to a powerful exhibition I viewed in the fall of 2013. This was a survey of significant work by Toronto based artist Micah Lexier at The Power Plant in Toronto's Harbourfront. The exhibition, *One, and Two, and More Than Two*, was installed from 21 September to 5 January, 2014 and featured a selection of Lexier's works that were created either individually, collaboratively, or encompassing more than one hundred different artists. Of particular interest was when I visited the second floor of the gallery and was faced with the work *I Am The Coin* (Figure 18). Created in 2010 this piece consists of twenty thousand custom minted coins, each of which is imprinted with one letter of the alphabet. At first

¹⁹ Toni Hafkenscheid. *I AM THE COIN*. An interview with Micah Lexier. The National Gallery of Canada. 18 Nov. 2013. Web. 1 March 2015. <<http://www.ngcmagazine.ca/artists/an-interview-with-micah-lexier/Micah-Lexier-in-collaboration-with-Derek-McCormack-I-am-the-Coin>>

glance the letters seems random but upon closer inspection it becomes clearer that "...the words and sentences combine to tell a story that was written [...] by Toronto writer Derek McCormack. The bottom half of the grid spells out the story, which can be read like a book, from left to right; the top half of the grid is a mirror image of the bottom."²⁰ Punctuation to assist in the legibility of the text has not been used. A viewer must spend time with the piece in order to reveal the narrative hidden within the grid of coins. *I Am The Coin* addresses themes of time, measurement, organization, language, and value while simultaneously prompting the viewer to engage and participate with the work through a process of decoding.

Lexier's themes and viewer engagement are paralleled in my exhibition through the works on carbon paper and the large-scale photographs entitled: *I Keep Coming Back to You* and *Untitled No. 1 to 7*. In *I Keep Coming Back to You* (Figures 19, 20), the paper has been produced by feeding each sheet through a manual typewriter and impressed with lines of text. The text is sourced from email correspondences from the same individual who inspired the casting of the wax bricks in *I Miss Talking To You*. In this instance he reached out once a year for two years to explore the possibility of starting over. Where communication failed in person, email was the primary method to express his on-going motives and intentions from one year to the next. In this particular piece the text is presented so that each line consists of only one letter that has been repeatedly typed across the page horizontally. The reading of the text moves downwards which prompts the viewer to decode each word vertically. The punctuation has remained intact to diversify the formal aesthetic of work and provide a clue to the manner in which the text is to be read. The force of the typing has not only impressed the paper but has also ripped through it recording my process of a sometimes strong, sometimes gentle, manual act.

²⁰ Lexier, Micah. *I AM THE COIN*. N.d. Web. 28 Feb. 2015



Figure 19 - *I Keep Coming Back To You*, Christos Pantieras

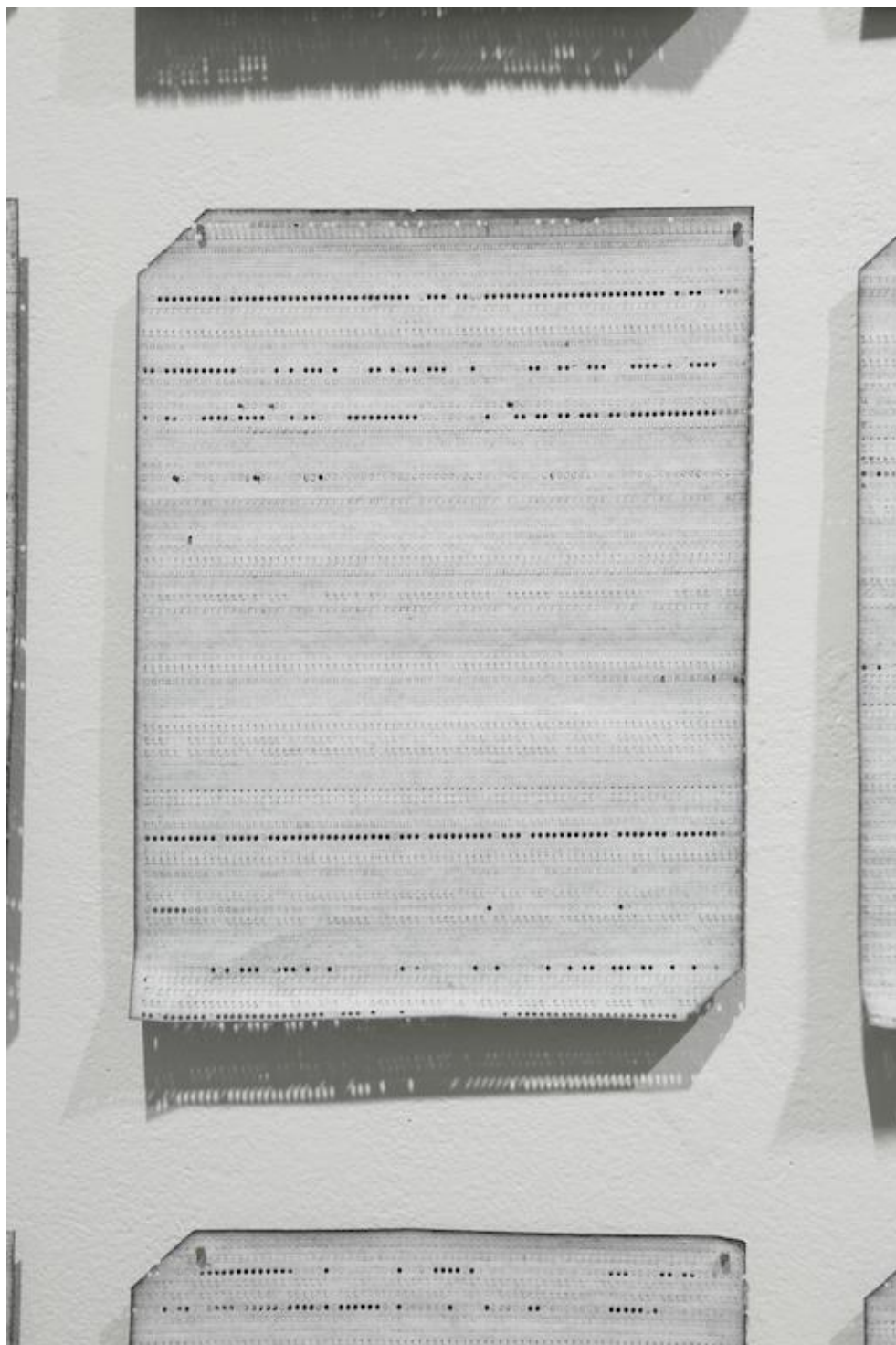


Figure 20 - *I Keep Coming Back To You* (detail), Christos Pantieras

Alongside these works are seven large-scale photographs each featuring one sheet of carbon paper magnified and documented as an artifact. *Untitled No. 1 to 7* (Figures 21, 22) resemble tablets or stone markings with engravings that have weathered away over time. In their archived state the works on paper become an echo of their original. In both forms the carbon papers symbolize the duplication of a recurring need to connect. In this instance the connection is not about one that was never truly invested in but rather one that was once lost and has lingered on. Like Lexier's *I Am The Coin*, these works are a tangible recording of time and value while revealing language that is to be deciphered. Both *I Keep Coming Back to You* and *Untitled No. 1 to 7* become an autobiographical measurement of a narrative that was maintained through online methods of communication.



Figure 21 - *Untitled No. 1 to 7* (installation view), Christos Pantieras

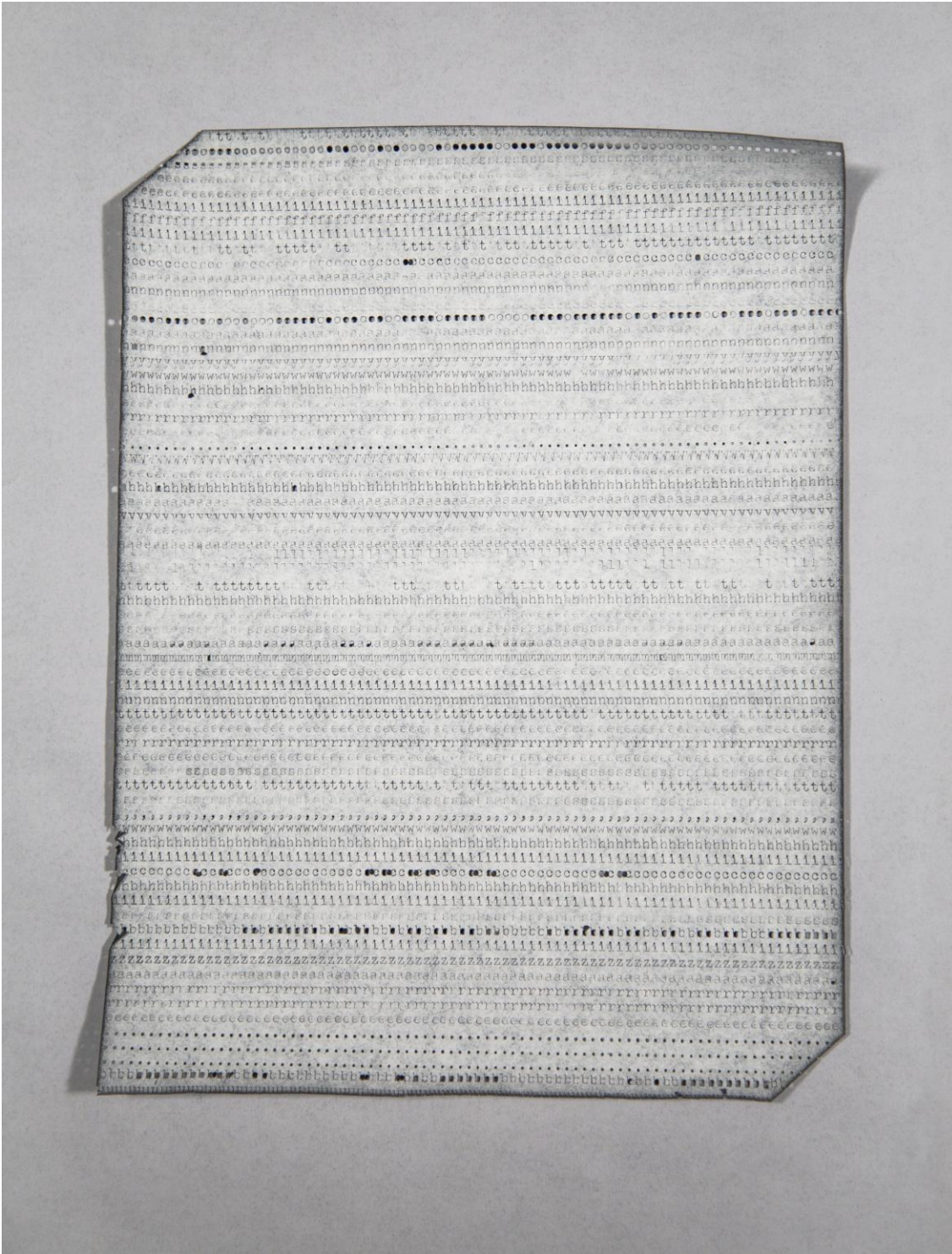


Figure 22 - Untitled No 3, Christos Pantieras



Figure 23 - *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, Félix González-Torres²¹

Tensions between past/future, presence/absence, public/private, space/solid, and temporary/permanent are presented throughout all bodies of work in this exhibition, and these parallels bring me to the works of artists Félix González-Torres and Rachel Whiteread. González-Torres is an American, Cuban-born gay artist who was known for his minimalist sculptures and installations. He produced work that evoked simplicity in its execution yet were highly meditative and reflective. For example *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* is a representation of the artist's partner, Ross Laycock, who died of an AIDS-related illness in 1991 (Figure 23). The installation is comprised of 175 pounds of candy, which corresponded to Ross's ideal body weight. A key feature in this work is the process of removal. Viewers were encouraged to take a piece of candy that contributed to the slow disappearance of the sculpture and also made reference to the declining health of González-Torres' partner.

²¹ *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*. Digital Image. Félix González-Torres. Shape+Colour. 23 June 2010. Web. 1 March 2015. <<http://shape-and-colour.com/2010/06/23/felix-gonzalez-torres-portrait-of-ross>>

I am drawn to this piece since, firstly, it prompts me to reflect upon the potential of interactivity with my own work, specifically with the sculptural installations in my thesis exhibition. Over the course of my research, I have installed variations of these works in other venues and events. *Say What You Mean* was installed for NuiteRose at Artscape Youngplace for World Pride in 2014, and *Hey.Horny.Grrrr.* was installed at The Better Living Centre for the 2015 edition of The Artist Project. On both occasions the works were perceived as interactive. The concrete letters were a tempting offering for children, but more so for adults who often reached down and handled the letters to gain an understanding of their production and to also manipulate them to spell out word and phrases of their own. This has prompted me to consider how I may integrate interaction in my work and if so, what the relevance and importance of doing so may be. Secondly, I'm drawn to González-Torres' work as he makes reference to love and loss, and to relationships and personal connections. With *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* the pile of candy speaks to those connections that have been taken away while my piles of concrete letters speak to those connections that were never attained. Both address what is temporary in relation to what is permanent. They are manifestations of the intangible and give form to that which is absent.

Rachel Whiteread is a British artist (born 20 April 1963) who produces sculptures of various scale and scope through the process of casting. Whiteread reclaims space and defamiliarizes the familiar by bringing voids into a physical presence, such as the under space of tables, beds, chairs, and the inside of rooms. Her choice of materials has included, but is not limited to: resin, plaster, rubber, dental plaster, and concrete. My affinity to Whiteread is grounded in what she chooses to cast as a subject and what materials she uses to do so.



Figure 24 – ‘House’ by Rachel Whiteread²²

As example, *House* (Figure 24) is a life size cast of a Victorian home in East London that consisted of concrete poured inside the structure. The outside walls were removed and what remained were cube like structures with the ghostly impressions of the inside revealed to the outside world. *House* is, in fact, a highly controversial piece of public art that had a short-lived existence from October 25, 1993 to January 11, 1994 (*House* was torn down). Although it is important to acknowledge the political and social debates surrounding this work, I want to link my affinities to Whiteread through her association of meaning to architecture (subject) and her use of concrete (material). In the essay ‘*Matters Immaterial*’, Shelley Hornstein writes: “Taken all too lightly most of the time, architecture – an object, a frame, a shell, a placemaker – is often ignored. Whiteread’s house-that-is-not-a-house demonstrates this powerfully. We carry on our daily activities always in, through, around architectural spaces yet we are almost indifferent to

²² House. Digital Image. Rachel Whiteread. 5osA. 26 Jan 2009. Web. 28 Feb 2105. <<http://5osa.tistory.com/entry/John-Davies-Rachel-Whiteread-HOUSE>>

them.”²³ My work is not about architecture but it is this invisibility of architecture that Whiteread refers to that I am drawn to. By bringing the immaterial (digital text) in to the state of material (cast letters) the use of concrete for all three of my sculptural installations is indicative of a shift in my own emotional investment in these online connections. It is now more common to engage in frivolous dialogue than in meaningful dialogue. There are so many people attached to a multitude of profiles along a plethora of online platforms that it takes very little effort to start a conversation. Making a connection is commonplace. Concrete is an industrial material that is commonplace. It is readily available and surrounds us as we move among our everyday. It is invisible. It is cold. Unless manipulated with tints or polished with a finish, the material itself is quite generic and unassuming. The letters are cast in concrete, as the connections they represent are equally as bland and cold. Concrete is the foundation material to build a structure upon it. The letters and words, formed in concrete and loosely assembled, represent the foundation of personal bonds that are unrealized and not built upon. By emphasizing the every day, Whiteread restores to the public consciousness the memories of lives that would have otherwise remained invisible.²⁴ She makes things matter by heightening the materiality of a thing, by blurring the divide between a private space and a public space, and by addressing presence through mass and weight.²⁵ The works in the exhibition, *Nice to ‘Meet’ You*, mirror these approaches and those previously linked to Micah Lexier and Félix González-Torres. There is a strong presence of resonance since history reverberates in our present moment and beyond.²⁶ Secrets, regrets, and casual utterances, that are invisible to others, are rendered visible as sediments in concrete and embodiments in carbon.

²³ Hornstein, Shelley. “Matters Immaterial”. *The Art of Rachel Whiteread*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2004. 51-67. Print.

²⁴ Townsend, Chris. “When We Collide.” *The Art of Rachel Whiteread*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2004. 6-34. Print.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

‘P’ IS FOR ‘PROCESS’

Randomly plucked from among thousands upon thousands of letters cast in the same industrial material the letter ‘P’ is a solitary fragile object, light in weight in its 2 x ¼ inch size, and modest in its singular presence. When placed among the masses with its brethren, ‘P’ is now one among many taking on a physical presence that evokes strength and channels a collective voice. These objects, as a whole, demand attention.

Casting is a technique used to form an object into a shape by pouring it when melted or soft into a mould, where it is then allowed to cool or harden.²⁷ In order to cast the concrete letters, narrow wooden boxes (2 x 28 x 4 inches) were fashioned in order to outline the form of the final mould. Slabs of clay were rolled to a thickness that permitted the use of letter-shaped cookie cutters. Each letter was cut out multiple times in order to fill the length of an entire wooden box. In some instances there was only room for ten letters, while in other instances there was room for twenty or more. With the use of the clay and the spraying of a release agent, the positive was now created in order to move forward and fabricate the rubber mould. Silicon rubber was measured out, mixed, and poured into the wooden boxes and over the various rows of the letters repeated in clay. Once having cured overnight, the rubber mould was removed and the clay re-used. This process was repeated until 50 moulds were created to expedite the production of the letters that would eventually be cast in concrete.

²⁷ Townsend, Chris. *The Art of Rachel Whiteread*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2004. Page. 58. Print.



Figure 25 - Studio progress of letters cast in cement

Using a ratio of 40% cement, 60% aggregate (sand), and then adding lukewarm water to create the mix, I press the wet mix into each mould; filling the voids shaped in various letters to create a solid state shaped into text (Figure 25). The mix is created four times in order to completely fill every mould just once. Draped over with a damp cloth and covered by a sheet of plastic, the cement is left overnight to begin the hardening process. The next day, one by one each letter is released from the mould and placed in a large container of water to continue the curing and hardening process for a length of seven days. Week by week, month by month this process is repeated. Slowly but steadily the amount of letter piled up in my studio space.

Why do I take such a time consuming and labour intense approaches to producing my

work? Why do I have repetition compulsion?²⁸ How might the traces of my presence be marked as an artist? I have been reflecting upon this the last few months and have noted underlying symbolism that connects the motivation of my practice to the method in which it is produced. For example, in reference to the relationships that were the catalysts to *I Miss Talking To You* and *Impress Me*, both were initiated through online dating sites before meeting IRL. In contrast the content for the sculptural installations created with the letters cast in cement, most of the online connections did not result in an IRL encounter. Through my own personal experiences it is apparent that there is not only a strong initial build-up of anticipation through online interaction but also a presence of indifference. “Equally important is the appearance of the body, not as subject [...] but as an absent instrument made evident [...] through a mix of traces, documents, and objects that register the physical presence of the artist.”²⁹

Although one can easily present him/herself in a means that may be completely truthful or partially/completely fabricated (the online persona), I have fallen victim to my own expectation of who will present themselves before my eyes. Throughout the online discourse, there is visualization of the tone of voice, the modest movements, and the body language of an individual prior to actually meeting him in person. Upon meeting the anticipation wanes as what you expected and imagined in your mind is not what is necessarily presented to you IRL. Of course this doesn’t mean that the person is not worthy of one’s time. On the contrary, it is a moment where one must dissolve the predetermined image and take the time to get to know each other. In my own experiences referenced in my works the relationship dissolved within a short amount of time and the effort that was not invested in the face-to-face courtship was re-invested in the

²⁸ Schwenger, Peter. “Words and the Murder of Things”, *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. Page 27. Print.

²⁹ Buskirk, Martha. *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003. Page. 242. Print.

production of my work. I have referred to my process of production as reverberations of emotional attachment, yet I also think of my process as rather pragmatic. When I consider the emphasis on the process and the emphasis on the making, I am drawn to the extensive individual practice of artists Ann Hamilton and Antony Gormley.



Figure 26 – *Malediction*, Anne Hamilton³⁰

An American born artist, Hamilton is known for her large-scale installations that integrate a range of media, including video, sculpture, photography, textile, printmaking, and performance. Her installations are a charged environment where the viewer is immersed in a theatrical arena and “...in many ways, Hamilton is a storyteller, but one whose language is not

³⁰ Malediction. Digital Image. The End of Being. n.d. Web. 28 Feb. 2015. <http://theendofbeing.com/?attachment_id=6766>

necessarily verbal...”³¹ One such installation is the piece *Malediction* (Figure 26), which opened on December 7, 1991. The R & K Bakery was one of the last operative industrial buildings in SoHo in the 1970’s. Once the business had relocated the building was purchased to become a contemporary art gallery. Within the memory laden architectural space³² Hamilton worked with a variety of material including rags and wine, and the repetitive act that was undertaken involved the making of bread. The installation was comprised of two rooms and in the second room a figure, Hamilton, was seated on a high chair at a long refectory table facing away from the viewer. On the table to her right was a long woven basket and to her left was a bowl filled with bread dough. Hamilton repeatedly tore off dough, rolled it in to a ball and then pressed it into the hollow cavity of her mouth. It was then removed and placed in the woven basket and, as the work continued over the course of the installation, the dough impressions began to accumulate.³³ *Malediction* was an act of celebration, mourning, of loss and renewal.

³¹ Simon, Joan. *Ann Hamilton*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002. Page 12. Print.

³² *Ibid.*, 121.

³³ *Ibid*



Figure 27 – *Field*, Antony Gormley³⁴

Antony Gormley's *Field* (Figure 27) is a "...reservoir of feeling into which many related personalities poured vibrations through their hands. The subject, the material and the process of production were thus interlinked in their human implications."³⁵ *Field* is an installation of small terra-cotta figurines that have been roughly hand-modelled and baked in brick kilns. Gormley has created various versions of *Field* from 1989 to 2003 and the number of terra-cotta figurines has dramatically increased from a modest one hundred and fifty to a staggering two hundred thousand. To create such a massive gathering of these figurines, Gormley worked in collaboration with the Texca family of brick makers in Cholula, Mexico. This installation speaks to encounter and to tracing the path of each individual element in to being. It is referenced in this

³⁴ Field. Digital Image. Antony Gormley. N.d. Web. 1 March 2015. <<http://www.antonygormley.com/projects/item-view/id/245>>

³⁵Thomas McEvelley and Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. *Field* : Antony Gormley. Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1993. Page.84. Print.

paper due to the enormity of the installation and the time consuming processes that directly relate to my own approach to art-making.

Although Gormley created his work as a collaborative piece, both he and Hamilton employ a process of sustained engagement. Correspondingly to these artists, I engage in the repetitiveness of simple actions using analogue processes and tools like typing and casting. Repetition generates power; it is an echo of a rhythmic exercise.³⁶ I maintain a sustained engagement with materials to accumulate and produce works of art that are sometimes pragmatic in their method of creation, like the letters cast in concrete, and other times fueled emotional reverberations, like text cut through carbon paper. As we live in a time of rapidity, I am slowing myself down to a pace of reflective and sustained engagement with my practice. This is reengagement where traces of my own physical presence and my own labour are evident in my work.³⁷ Through my practice I trace the trajectory of each online encounter by bringing a communiqué into being.

³⁶ Abramovic, Marina. "The House is My Body". York University: The Aesthetics of Affect. Print.

³⁷ Buskirk, Martha. *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003. Page 256. Print.

‘B’ IS FOR ‘BOOM OR BUST’

During my years in Intermediate School (1986-1988), I recall the excitement of receiving a hand written note from several of my classmates. Whether it was given to me in stealth, exchanged in passing as we moved between rooms, or handed over during classes, these notes were a timeline of discourse. Much like today where several chats can be navigated simultaneously on our desktops and hand held devices, these hand written notes that were carefully folded in a specific and precise method every time, were the pre-online versions of present day instant messaging. Written in these notes were recounts of our daily activities, our thoughts of the latest musician to hit no.1, impressions, gossip, and opinions of our teachers and of our classmates. Most noteworthy, what was captured in these notes were the feelings of excitement and anticipation of our latest crush, or the innocent flirtations with my interest of that week; young love never seemed to last very long.

Over thirty years later the same emotions of initial excitement and flirtatious courtship are still at play. However in 2015, the forum and the arena in which connections are made and the speed in which they are played out has changed. We are now engulfed in media and always wired to our devices. Online dating is different today because we have (1) more opportunities for creative lying; (2) the commodification and the human catalogue; (3) the separation of sex and love; (4) lots of dates.³⁸ As a gay male who has engaged various online platforms in order to initiate and develop both short-term and long-term connections, I have personally encountered dishonesty by others with the misrepresentation of oneself through fictional profiles or exaggerated information regarding ones physical appearance (age, weight, height). Dating sites also encourage commodity as profiles are scrolled through in order to identify an interest that is

³⁸ Vitzthum, Virginia. *I Love You, Let's Meet: Adventures in Online Dating*. New York: Little, Brown, 2007.

initially based on appearance and sexual desire. This then provides the foundation that most interaction is grounded with the intention of sex or a hook-up, and with the plethora of online profiles there is an abundance of choice.

Online dating sites began emerging in the 1980's³⁹ where individuals would create a personal profile that would include a picture, some basic statistics (height, weight, hair and eye colour), and a brief paragraph describing themselves and what they are looking for. As technology evolved so did the variety of sites expand to cater to the various communities; this included sites like Plenty of Fish, Gay411, and Bear411.⁴⁰ Initial contact is established through these sites and then, once agreed between the two parties, dialogue is transferred over to a quicker form of engagement through either email, instant messaging, or to the less favoured telephone conversation. Grindr, Scruff, and GROWLr are social media applications targeted to the gay community where individuals generate profiles to solicit casual, sexual, or long-term same-sex encounters. These apps make use of a hand held device's geo-location technology in order to facilitate contact with another individual in close proximity. There was a time, in the not too distant past, where meeting others entailed going to a public place or to local establishments for cruising.⁴¹ Today, these apps have changed the landscape of courtship within the gay community by reconstructing the public space. Social media enable the sharing of things. Members of this particular community are no longer tied to a specific physical location to meet each other and interact. Public spaces are no longer confined to physical locations as there are now both offline and online arenas.⁴²

With these tools now readily available, love and lust are expedited through dating sites and

³⁹ Carr, A. and Whitty, Monica T. *Cyberspace Romance: The Psychology of Online Relationships*. Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

⁴⁰ www.pof.com, www.gay411.com, www.bear411.com

⁴¹ "Cruising" is referred to the practice of seeking out sexual encounters through body language and eye contact before initiating conversation.

⁴² Dijk, Jan van. *The Network Society*. 3rd ed. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2012. Page 190. Print.

mobile apps. The apparent ease of finding true and everlasting love online creates the need to have such ‘perfect’ love.⁴³ The pace of the online relationship is swift and not fully nurtured as it is easy to find alternate partners if one’s expectations are not met. Aaron Ben-Zeev states:

“Modern society promotes the value of efficiency and [...] speed. We acquire information in a speedy and efficient manner. By pressing a button we know/acquire personal information of who we’re about to meet.”⁴⁴ When we don’t have all of the information we tend to fill in the blanks and fall in love with a fabricated relationship, or with the notion of falling in love.

The following is an exchange that took place with an individual that will be referred to herein as ‘Jeff’. I first connected with Jeff online through a dating site accessed via the web and then after a few exchanges, we transferred over to text messaging on our mobile devices. The following are excerpts of text messages, all of which are written by Jeff, taken from our communication that lasted less than a week:

Mon. Apr 7,

...here we are meeting on Bear411 in our 40’s and single...lmao (5:41 pm)

...would like to meet you sooner rather than later and if what’s going on in our chat is any indication...Thursday will feel like forever getting here...lol

Tues, Apr 8

Ok...am smitten (10:17 am)

Let’s elope lol (10:30 am)

And you and I have clicked in the biggest way I’ve ever clicked before having met in person (10:51 am)

Wed, Apr 9

Hey sorry crazy day in course. Taking delivery of my contents tonite so don’t have to miss tomorrow morning. Could we do Saturday or Sunday for our date? (3:07 pm)

⁴³ Ben-Zeev, Aaron. *Love Online: Emotions On the Internet*. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 21.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

Thur, Apr 10

Lordy lordy is it Friday yet lol (10:53 am)

Fri, Apr 11

[No response to communication]

Sat, Apr 12

*My apologies for delayed response as its been an off week all around. I should have taken the time to be more immediately upfront but after we spoke on the phone the chemistry that I had hoped I'd feel didn't seem to maintain. I wish you all the best. Take care (3:28 pm)*⁴⁵

As inferred in the dialogue, the intent was to meet IRL. In order to finalize location and time, a very brief phone conversation took place that lasted approximately two minutes. The text message exchange with Jeff is a testament to how online relationships can develop rapidly and intensely, only to be halted at the first sign of disinterest or dissatisfaction. This brings to light the 'boom or bust phenomenon', as argued by Alvin Cooper and Leda Sportolari:

Such an accelerated process of revelation may increase the chance that the relationship will feel exhilarating at first, and become quickly eroticized, but then not be able to be sustained because the underlying trust and true knowledge of the other are not there to support it.⁴⁶

Writing to a stranger is like writing in a diary as you are free to express your inner most thoughts and feelings. You build up this rapport and the expectations of each other are high and fall in love because we don't have all of the information but we fill in the gaps.⁴⁷

Although my examples have focused on my experiences as a gay male, the contemporary realities of online flirting and dating are evidenced for other communities as well. In an article published by the New York Times, author Teddy Wayne writes:

⁴⁵ "Jeff", personal communication, Monday, April 7 to Saturday, April 12, 2015

⁴⁶ Carr, A. and Whitty, Monica T. *Cyberspace Romance: The Psychology of Online Relationships*. Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

⁴⁷ Ben-Zeev, Aaron. *Love Online: Emotions On the Internet*. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.176.

More and more technophilic and commitment-phobic millenials are shying away from physical encounters and supplanting them with the emotional gratification of virtual quasi relationships, flirting via their phones and computers with no intention of ever meeting their romantic quarry.⁴⁸

Here it is clear that being online has changed the face of personal presence and dating. With digital communication there is loss of the rich non-verbal cues of face-to-face interaction and body language. Connections that are made online are low risk and always at hand. In a pretend or make-believe environment there is a release from the physicality of being present and a reduced sense of accountability for ones actions; “[...] time spent with media takes people away from human interaction and breaks down social connectedness and community [...]”⁴⁹ Technology makes it easy to communicate and to also disengage at will.⁵⁰ There is a shift from engagement to disengagement, or a ‘detached attachment’ where physical separation is detached but emotions sustain the attachment. It is here where relational fragments are created and linger as a resonance of a lost connection.

⁴⁸ Wayne, Teddy. “With Some Dating Apps: Less Casual Sex Than Casual Text.” The New York Times, 7 Nov. 2014. Web. 27 Jan. 2015

⁴⁹ Macnamara, Jim. *The 21st Century Media (re)volution: Emergent Communication Practices*. New York: Peter Lange, 2010. Page 84. Print.

⁵⁰ Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other*. New York: Basic Books, 2011.

CONCLUSION

Words today are infinitely produced. Words are detritus. Words are additive as they pile up. Words are recycled, repurposed, reclaimed. Words are both physical and material that can be inserted into the environment and engaged.⁵¹ Words are temporary, reshaped, shoveled, hoarded, molded, and discarded quickly. Words are treated by their materiality as what they weigh has gained value over what they mean. The works in *Nice to 'Meet' You* take on such qualities in their use of language as a material. Thousands of letters cast in concrete swell onto the floor to form intermittent greetings and phrases culled from gay hook-up apps in *HEY. HORNY. GRRRR*. The head of an industrial grade broom is buried under a pile of concrete letters forcing the shaft of the broom to stand upright by the weight of the unformed words in *Say What You Mean*. A text message revealing ones admission of potential guilt is formed through a repeated arrangement of letters lined up in the corner of the room with *I'm Not Supposed To Be Going Where I'm Treading With You*. Text from emails, composed in regret and in hope of a renewed connection, are impressed and ripped in to the surface of sheets of carbon paper in the series *I Keep Coming Back To You*. Large-scale photographs scale twelve of these carbon paper works to a size that monumentalizes each individual sheet to evoke a tablet or a documentation of a relic. The works reveal those connections that have been facilitated through online means yet they have not been maintained to foster a relation. There is an untold story that continues to resonate beyond the tap of a screen and the works in the exhibition begin to reveal that narrative.

We live in a time when connections are plentiful through social media and online platforms, but are they truly meaningful? Sherry Turkle states: "Human relationships are rich and

⁵¹ Goldsmith, Kenneth. *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011. Page 218. Print.

they're messy and they're demanding. And we clean them up with technology. And when we do, one of the things that can happen is that we sacrifice conversation for mere connection.”⁵² And when that connection is made we are looking to nurture a relationship of some form, whether temporary or long-term. Post-communication there is a parting of ways, yet there are remnants that linger: the ongoing resonance of hope, the feelings of anticipation and excitement, or the state of confusion and uncertainty. There is always evidence of an interchange between individuals. With my practice-based research I explore this evidence as manifestations of the fragments of a relationship. These relational fragments are forged from online interaction and communication. Although the works in *Nice to 'Meet' You* explore the resonance that lingers from these connections, this thesis exhibition and supporting paper does not mark and end to this exploration.

As we continue to increasingly communicate online and technology continues to evolve, my practice will grow and develop as the manifestations of my personal commentaries and reflections of such happenings. As example, a future exploration that I envision involves creating an immersive space where the floor is completely covered and tiled with the concrete letters and held in place, to some degree, by using sand as the grout. Visitors to the installation would be able to enter the space and walk on the concrete letters. Their movement within the space would cause the letters to be pushed, kicked, and dispersed in all directions. Under the weight of each visitor's step the letters would crack, break, and crumble as they begin to be transformed in to dust-like material and blend in with the sand. As a speculative installation that investigates future online connections, their untold stories, and is firmly grounded in my current practice-based research, I ask: is it truly the end once one has pressed 'delete'?

⁵² Turkle, Sherry. "Connected, but alone?" TED. Feb. 2012. Lecture.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abramovic, Marina. "The House is My Body". York University: The Aesthetics of Affect.
- Ben-Zeev, Aaron. *Love Online: Emotions On the Internet*. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Brennan, Teresa, *The Transmission of Affect*, Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2004.
- Buskirk, Martha. *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003.
- Carr, A. and Whitty, Monica T. *Cyberspace Romance: The Psychology of Online Relationships*. Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Dijk, Jan van. *The Network Society*. 3rd ed. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2012.
- Fleet, Vanessa. and Toye. Megan., *Encounters*, York University, 2015.
- Goldsmith, Kenneth. *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
- Hornstein, Shelley. "Matters Immaterial". *The Art of Rachel Whiteread*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2004.
- Macnamara, Jim. *The 21st Century Media (re)volution: Emergent Communication Practices*. New York: Peter Lange, 2010.
- Mizgala, Johanna. *Christos Pantieras: Your Word Is Bond*. Ottawa: Ottawa Art Gallery, 2012.
- Shouse, Eric. "Feeling, Emotion, Affect," M/C Journal 8.6 (2005). <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/13-probyn.php>.
- Townsend, Chris. "When We Collide." *The Art of Rachel Whiteread*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2004.
- Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other*. New York: Basic Books, 2011.
- Turkle, Sherry. "Connected, but alone?" TED. Feb. 2012. Lecture.
- Vitzthum, Virginia. *I Love You, Let's Meet: Adventures in Online Dating*. New York: Little, Brown, 2007.
- Wayne, Teddy. "With Some Dating Apps: Less Casual Sex Than Casual Text." The New York Times, 7 Nov. 2014. Web. 27 Jan. 2015
- Simon, Joan. *Ann Hamilton*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002.